

Mission Preposterous

Hunter swats at yet another fly. He misses. Again.

He's in the middle of the Amazon jungle. There's foliage to his left, to his right, above him and below him. The sun is beginning to set sending out orange and yellow streams of light in-between the trees and bushes.

Hunter is in the middle of a jungle that he had only read about and his fears are slowly becoming reality. He can't go back now. He can't quit.

Hunter knows that it will take him hours to get to the perfect spot. Early in the morning, a helicopter flew him onto a grassy plain about ten miles outside the Amazon. From there, Hunter hiked till he reached the edge.

He had had his doubts when he received this assignment but his superior thought out of all the others Hunter was the best person for the job. Hunter was both honored and scared out of his mind. Everyone knew that when the superior recommends you for a job, it's the best praise one can get. When everyone found out, Hunter was showered with adoration and pats on the back. Inside, Hunter was just as frightened as he was when he was little and his mom shut off the lights. On the outside, Hunter smiled and acted as if he was really excited but he couldn't help but feel his stomach twist and his throat tighten.

Many times, Hunter felt the urge to turn around and call it quits, but he kept telling himself that he could do this. After this was over, Hunter could go back to his comfortable home and peaceful life. Hunter shakes his head to rid himself of these thoughts. He needs to focus on

the task at hand, but the jungle never seems to end. Everywhere he turns, there are more trees and more poison dart frogs and the like.

Hunter was already physically and mentally prepared for this assignment. Two days after the superior told him of this mission, he was given a personal trainer who worked him to the bone. Hunter couldn't head out until the personal trainer told the superior when he was ready, not a moment before. After each session, Hunter's arms, legs, stomach and head hurt like someone set his body on fire. So many times when he tried to go to sleep, he couldn't because he could never find a spot to lay on that didn't scream in pain.

Hunter was also put on a strict diet. No sugar, no fat and no salt, whatsoever. This was a huge problem for Hunter because his biggest weakness was root beer floats. Once he tried to sneak one while he was on break and his personal trainer knocked it clear from his hand causing the white walls to be stained brown. Hunter also had to clear out his refrigerator. Afterwards, all that remained in his kitchen was bottled water and hummus. His personal trainer bought him some things from a nearby health food store but Hunter was grossed out by most of this, but he didn't dare let his personal trainer know his lack of interest. He figured he would just order pizza when the personal trainer left. To Hunter's dismay, his personal trainer was also a chef and stayed with Hunter 24/7 to make sure that Hunter didn't veer off his diet.

Hunter groans at the memory. He now understands why he was put through the diet and the exercise. Hunter is carrying a 50 lbs backpack filled with binoculars, a pocket knife, matches, a metal canister that held 3 quarts of water, heat tabs, soap, a poncho, bandages, MRE packets, a .35-caliber pistol, a Russian Dragunov SVD rifle, six boxes of ammunition, rope, a machete, malaria tablets, flashlight, surgical tape, a first aid kit, a tea kettle, and a table setting (plate, cup,

fork, knife, spoon). The backpack felt heavier with each step he took. Now, it's on the ground and the binoculars around his neck. He scopes out the area when he got there and no one is in sight.

Hunter had read about the Amazon jungle before he hopped into the helicopter. He was told to memorize which bugs and plants were poisonous and which were edible. Before long, he found out that hundreds upon thousands of plants and bugs grew and lived in the Amazon. Piles of books sat on his kitchen table back home in Atlanta, Georgia. There were big books, small books and they were all about some aspect of the Amazon; its plant life, animals including ones that might try to kill him such as Vipers, weather and traps to look out for like quicksand.

Hunter remembers when he looked up “jungle” on dictionary.com, one of its definition were “A wild land overgrown with dense vegetation, often nearly impenetrable.” So far, Hunter has to agree. It is nearly impenetrable. He has also come to believe that traveling through the jungle is an art form because one must know where to place their feet. Quicksand was a huge danger if he stepped in it, he must grab onto something sturdy like a trunk of a tree or a bush. He must not panic, but instead remain calm and breathe. It would be quite possible to get himself out of quicksand, but only if he thinks clearly.

Reading all those books had hurt his eyes as well as his brain. They gave him headaches and he had trouble sleeping sometimes. All through school, he wasn't much of a reader. Whenever a teacher gave a reading assignment, he would read the beginning, skim the middle then skip to the end. Never in his whole life had he ever read a book from cover to cover until this assignment, but he didn't just read one book, he read twenty.

His fatigue is getting to him and the sun was blazing. The heat of the sun in the jungle is like a sauna. He's sweating like crazy. The ants and flies refuse to leave him alone. They crawl up his legs and buzzed around his head. After awhile, Hunter grows tired of shaking them off and just let them crawl and buzz. Though, he has to be careful of certain ones because some of them would bite. So far he has only gotten two, but who knows how many more before the assignment is over.

Hunter sighs for what seemed like the millionth time since he started the journey. He wishes he were back in the States in his comfortable king size bed and AC on at 55 degrees like he always had it. He needs to focus. There is no time for this kind of thinking. "Special Assignment, my foot!" grumbles Hunter. It will all be over soon enough. He just needs to find the perfect spot.

Roaming through the jungle causes Hunter to wonder...a lot...maybe too much. One of the nagging questions that keep pestering him is why in the world he was sent on this mission? Why not someone else? Hunter never liked to be put on the spot, not even when he knew he deserved the recognition. When he received a plaque for bravest man of the year, he wanted to hide in the bathroom; away from the hundreds of eyes peering at him. Another question, why did this subject need to put away discreetly? In Hunter's line of work, he knew it was better not to ask questions, but that didn't stop them from flooding his brain. Everything about this mission is preposterous- even the boots that weighed him down.

He has on huge black work boots that seem to shake the ground that let every critter know he was coming. They're heavy and Hunter had a hard time imagining anyone wearing these at all unless they absolutely had to. He had seen some people wear these around stores; the

crazy people. Maybe they would want to trade places with him, see how they like trudging through the jungle.

“The jungle isn’t all bad,” Hunter thinks to himself. He has seen some pretty cool neat animals and he finds himself wishing that he has brought his camera. Hunter doesn’t even have his phone. His superior took that from him because people can easily pick up on a cell phone signal and blow his cover. So instead, he has a ham radio with a special frequency number he is supposed to use to contact base. Whenever he has to call base, Hunter is supposed to use a special frequency and use code when speaking. He had to memorize those too in case someone tried to jump him, they couldn’t get a hold of the codes. He hasn’t had to use the radio just yet but Hunter is thinking about calling base just to hear someone’s voice. He has been in the jungle for three days and is beginning to feel lonely. So lonely in fact, that he has been having full conversations with himself out loud. Hunter is starting to think that he’s losing his mind. “I can’t go insane now. I need to focus,” he keeps telling himself this over and over again as he continues to walk through yet more jungle.

It’s the fourth day when he finds a small pond. The water is clear and beautiful. He breathes in the fresh air. There is a mist coming off the pond that makes it look like paradise. Suddenly, Hunter feels all the dirt that clings to his face and hands. He can smell the sweat sweep into his nostrils. So he throws off his clothes and jumps in head first. The cool water feels so good and so clean. He swims around a few times around the pond, thinking that he could stay in this clear pond all day as he floats. He slowly closes his eyes.

A second later, something interrupts his peaceful thoughts. A bubble emerges next to him, a big one. Hunter sees it and brushes it off as his own fart bubble and he closes his eyes

again. A minute later, more bubbles. Hunter starts treading water and looks around. There's no one in sight. Confused and a tad curious, he dives down to see if there is any fish that could have caused those bubbles. He dives down really far when he sees the biggest eye he has ever seen. Startled, he backs up a little then swims around it. He catches sight of a tail that looks like a shark or whale. As he slowly swims closer he realizes it isn't a shark nor is it a whale. It is in fact a silver arowana. He remembers reading about these. They can grow very big when left alone. It seems to Hunter that this fish was the only living animal in the entire pond so it makes sense it was as big as a shark. Hunter is still looking at it when the silver arowana wakes up from its deep sleep. Before he can react, the large fish saw him. Eyes wide, Hunter quickly turns around and swims back to the surface. Another thing that he remembers is that the silver arowana has been known to attack people. With all his might, Hunter swims upward. He is starting to get light headed and lose energy but Hunter continues. He can't die yet; he hasn't finished his mission yet. He breaks the surface of the water and is gasping for breath. He isn't completely out of danger until he reaches the shore. The water bank is two strokes away when he feels the silver arowana's teeth sink into his leg. Hunter screams and kicks it away with his other foot. He crawls onto the bank and lies down. He looks toward the pond and it is still again. The fish is nowhere to be found.

He looks at the wound on his left leg and finds three gashes about an inch long. There is blood running down his leg and he takes out his emergency first aid kit, cleans the wounds and puts bandages on them. Hunter carefully stands up and starts to walk in order to test to see how well he can perform his duties. He puts on antibiotic cream so they shouldn't hurt as much as before. He dries himself off with a small towel then puts his clothes back on. After gathering his gear up, he heads back into the wild mass of trees.

Seeing the cool blue pond, Hunter is reminded of when his family used to take a vacation every summer for the 4th of July to a small lake an hour north of his town. His father would always take him fishing on the boat that they built together. Once when Hunter was twelve, he caught a large sea bass; the biggest fish he had ever caught. Usually he catches small minnows or algae. His father had said, "Son, don't ever give up. Don't let anyone tell you that you can't do something. Be the best you can be whatever it is in life." "What if I'm scared? What if I have to do something really difficult?" he remembers asking his father. Soon after Hunter had uttered those words, he wished he hadn't because what his father said next shook him, but stuck with him through every endeavor Hunter did. "I am a sailor and I will forever be a sailor because I never gave up even when I seriously wanted to. You know why? I didn't give up because in order to be the best in something, you have to earn it and to earn it, you have got to work hard. I don't want you to settle for something just because it's easy."

From that day on, Hunter never gave up on anything. He always finished what he began whether it was a test, learning basketball, rock climbing, sailing, boot camp, relationships. He always strived toward his goals. When he and his mother got handed his father's flag and medals a few years ago, Hunter told himself that he would continue his dad's legacy. Hunter never thought in his wildest dreams that he would be doing exactly what his father had done for a living, but here he is, on another mission fighting to destroy destruction.

On day five, he sees a glimpse of a house. As he gets closer, he realizes this isn't any normal house. First of all, who would build a house in the middle of the Amazon? Second, who would be so paranoid enough to have an electric fence surround the house and property? No one else lives in the Amazon besides the few natives.

The house itself is huge. It's a three story house that seems to be made of marble straight out of the magazine "Millionaire Houses". Hunter crouches down to avoid being seen by the sentries and the video cameras. He takes out his binoculars and scans the area. The house seems to be surrounded by at least twenty sentries and the electric fence is about ten feet high. The property the house sits on is around ten acres or more. Hunter sits down on the ground and checks his watch. According to the briefing that he had back in his office building, the man of the house is supposed to come out of the house tomorrow at precisely eleven p.m. and go into his helicopter to fly to a meeting in Las Vegas, Nevada.

When Hunter was briefed he was told everything imaginable about this man. Everything was given to him except the man's name. In his line of work, there were no names that way no feelings would interfere with the job. The less personal, the better and the less likely that Hunter would be killed.

Hunter knows that this man loves to be on time and has a schedule that he follows rigorously. Hunter even knows what the guy eats for breakfast, which was always the same thing; a poached egg, cinnamon toast, Corn Pops with soy milk and a tall glass of orange juice. Hunter starts to get hungry thinking about it so he hides himself behind a bush and takes out some MRE packets. "Ugh. Why do these have to be so gross? How do SEALs eat this stuff?" Hunter groans, but this is all he has so he takes a deep breath and inhales it. He needs his strength for tomorrow night, that when he will strike.

Until then, Hunter cases the joint by walking around to find the best spot for surveillance. It has to be a spot where he can see, but not be seen easily. He also needs to be able to have a clear view of the front door and the man's helicopter. His mission is to kill the target before he

gets onto the helicopter. If he doesn't succeed, Hunter needs to execute a quick plan to take down the helicopter before it reaches its destination. If Hunter fails, he might as well never return to the United States.

After a couple of hours of dodging the sentries and cameras, Hunter finds the perfect spot to assassinate his chosen target. He puts down his gear and waits for night to fall. He watches the target's miniature army pace back and forth. No way does Hunter wish to be them, no matter the pay grade. That has got to be the most boring job ever. What in the world could happen in the middle of the Amazon? Well, tonight they will have the surprise of their lives.

At ten forty five p.m., Hunter takes out his Russian Dragunov SVD rifle and loads it. Hopefully, he only has to use one bullet. A chance to fire twice might not come and still get out of the jungle alive. The sky is black and the only light sources are the artificial lights coming from the target's house.

The door opens at precisely eleven and the man walks down the steps. There are two guards standing next to him looking around, covering the man's side and back. Both men are stealthy making glances at the tree line. Hunter takes careful aim and fires.

Bull's-eye.

The target barely had time to cry out before his six foot and wide frame fell to the soft grass less than five feet from his helicopter. His bodyguards reacted first. Their machine guns aimed toward the jungle as they practically fell over each other trying to find the assassin. Hunter's not worried because all trace of his presence is gone except the body.

Hunter has a silencer on the shot gun so no one knew where the shot came from. As soon as Hunter sees that the millionaire's down, he high tails it back into the jungle, dismantling the gun along the way. To any "normal" person, this would have been a feat that should be nearly impossible, but not for Hunter. His trainer made sure he could do this in twenty seconds flat. They had even practiced doing it while running uphill.

He could hear the sentries shouting to each other. Hunter didn't look back. Previously, Hunter and the superior came up with a rendezvous point which was only three miles north of his present position. Hunter only needs his attackers kept at bay until then. He keeps running and leaping over fallen logs. His breathing becomes labored after awhile and Hunter stops to take a quick swig from his canteen. The shouting gets louder. He can see a couple of the sentries in the distance. There's no time to lose, not even for water. Hunter picks up the pace, sweat drizzling down his side burns. When he gets home, he will definitely thank his trainer. After what felt like hours, he came upon the rendezvous spot where a Black Hawk helicopter was waiting. He jumped into the plane and closed the doors, then motioned to the pilot to lift off. Seconds later, they were flying over the treetops. Laughing, he sees the sentries try to bring his helicopter down. Flying higher into the sky, Hunter sighs leaning back into his seat. He took out his radio and spoke, "Falcon has fallen. Repeat. Falcon has fallen." A crackle sounded from the radio before a voice said, "Well done and welcome home." Hunter smiled and fell into a much needed and deserved asleep.